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A
LETTER

To the AUTHOR of the

Interest of *Scotland*
CONSIDERED;

Containing some Hints about the
Linnen Manufactures.



EDINBURGH:

Printed for GAVIN HAMILTON, by R. FLEMING and
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LETTER

To the Author of the

History of Scotland

Containing

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EDINBURGH

Printed by James Ballantyne, Edinburgh.



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 TO THE
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S I R,

I Was glad to find by an Advertisement in the publick Papers, that you had desired from your Country-men, what Helps they thought fit to send you, before your Book should be re-printed. This Offer I look on as furnishing us with a Bow to shoot in, but not as setting up your Performance as a Mark to be shot at; I therefore embrace the Liberty you have given, and send you some Hints that occur to me on the Linnen Manufacture; leaving it to you to publish or suppress all or any Part of them, as you shall think fit: Or if any

of the Things I advance appear to you dubious, which if true might be useful, that you would publish them alone, before your Book undergoes a second Impression, that you may have the Opinion of others on these Points; for all I pretend to offer, are only probable, but not certain Informations or Conclusions.

There has been no Period in the Memory of Man, in which the Linnen Manufactory has been more talked of than it is now. Necessity and publick Encouragement have driven the Country to it as our *dernier Resort*. Hitherto it is but little followed to Purpose, witness the Exportation of our Yarn, and from the Scantiness of our publick Funds, it is far less encouraged. However, as the Spirit is up, it ought to be cherished; for if it should happen to be broke, no living Man will see it return; every Thing must have a Beginning, and through Time our Country-men will I hope throw in more Stock, and acquire greater Skill, and the Government I am hopeful may afford larger Aid.

Now, supposing Industry to be introduced into this Country, nothing that appears to me can hinder our doing well, but one of these, *viz.* Want of Stock, Want of Skill, Want of Honesty, or Want of Profit. Indeed I know not well how our first Want can be soon supplied, but we may be taught the second; proper Checks may make us honest; and as the constant em-

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ploying of Weavers in making Cloth for Bleaching, is the most tedious Manufacture on Earth, publick Funds must help to make up the Profits.

That I may be the better understood in what follows, it will be needful to observe some Things about our present general Practice, relative to this Manufactory.

In the West Country, they spin very little Wool, but are employed in spinning and weaving Cotton and Flax throughout the Year. In the South and North Countries, they would spin Wool all the Year round; but by Reason of the Grease that is in it, it cannot be spun in cold Weather, unless in a warm Place, or by a Fire. Rather than bestow this Cost, as they are commonly not well provided with firing, they spin Flax from after Harvest till warm Weather begins to return in the Spring, and then fall to Wool again. Thus it seems rather from Necessity than Choise it is, that they spin the Flax. The woolen Yarn in the South Country, is used for coarse Cloths, Grograms, Searges and *Musleburgh* Stuffs. That of the North, for Stockins, Fingrams, Blankets, &c. This Practice in the South and North Countries makes it, that from the 1st of *June*, to the 1st *December*, the Linnen-weavers there are obliged to change their Work, and betake themselves either to the working of Woolen, else go to the Fishing, or Harvest, or be Idle; and

and even during the six Months they are employed in Linnen, they must work such Sorts as are given them, and give as many Ells out of the Spindle, as they from an overly looking on the Yarn have agreed to. And here, for illustrating their Practice, I shall give you a Specimen of this Manufacture on a Piece of coarse Cloth when the House-wife gets her Will.

The House-wife having set her Maids to work after Harvest is over, may be supposed by the 1st of *December*, and no sooner, to have ten Spindles of Yarn ready; she obliges her Weaver, who by this Time is glad of Employment, to lay eighty Yards of it for an eight hundred Reed, whereas it should only make seventy two Yards in a nine hundred Reed: Thus the House-wife and the Weaver concur in making bad Cloth; he for his Ease, she for a seeming, tho' not a real Profit: For suppose as much to be given to the Weaver for working the seventy two Yards as for the eighty, he plying his Work, and striking as much Weft into it as in the eighty Yards, there would be eight Yards less to bleach, and the seventy two Yards would yield as much Money from any judicious Buyer as the eighty: But this is not all, the Weaver wynds, warps, and looms his Web, and the Weft is but spinning, and he frequently sits idle for want of it, and then as it comes from the Rock it is thrown into the Web, without sorting, and perhaps with.

without washing; and now the Weaver has a good Pretext for laying all his own Faults on the different West, which makes him careless how he weaves it; and it generally ends in this, that the Maids having disappointed the House-wife, she must buy or borrow from her Neighbours such Yarn as she can get to complete her West, and in this Manner a great deal of Cloth is finished.—Before I leave this I would propose a Remedy, if the Trustees would encourage some fit Person to go through the Country, and prevail with some wise Woman in a Parish, whose Example would be followed, with Advice of her Weaver, to make her Web but seventy two Yards, and agree to give her as much Money as she formerly got for her eighty Yards; and because, as is already said, her West will not be timeously ready, to give this Weaver another Yarn-beam to his Loom, which will enable him, on laying by this Piece when his West fails, to work another Piece to some other Person while the House-wife is making ready.

What is above said I take to be often the Case in making of coarse Cloth, where the House-wife gets her Will. Please now view the other Side, when it is left to the Weaver, and see if it goes better with the fine Cloth; in the former Case the Yarn is too light kamm'd, in this which follows it is often too throng. Let us suppose a Weaver has got twenty Spindles of
Yarn

Yarn from a House-wife, to take his own Way with, as the hundreds are now introduced, and the House-wives begin to pay by them, at least they often have a very great Influence on the Price; the Weaver will be apt to slay too high, that he may have the more hundreds to count on, putting perhaps twelve Spindle of this twenty to his Warp, while he uses only eight to his West. If the Custom of working three Threeds in the Reed could be totally hindred, there would be little Harm in slaying high, where fine West was to be used, at least there would follow fewer bad Consequences from it; for the Weaver, if he over-slayed it, would find he cou'd not work it, but must cut it out, and put it in a thinner Reed, and consequently need more West, because the Web must be broader than he intended, and had agreed on: But while with 1600 Yarn he can work any Thing above it to a 2400, he goes on with three in the Reed, and the House-wives are abused.

This is one Reason why the same hundreds cannot be sold for the same Money. I knew one of our most skilful Buyers have in his Offer at the same Time two Pieces of Cloth marked with the same hundred, and he gave 5 *lb.* for the best one, while he refused the other at 3 *lb.* 6 *d.* And I can make it appear that another Dealer refused to buy four Pieces of one Kind that were offered him for half a Crown, while he was selling

selling what he had of the same hundred at 5 sh. 6 d. It may perhaps be thought by some, that Slaying-tables might cure this, because by them every one might know how to Kamm their Webs. I answer, Slaying-tables of themselves are not sufficient, and it would be far from answering the End, to make one Rule for all the different Sorts of Yarn of the same Weight, while some Parcels might be hard twined, some slack twined, some of foreign Flax, and some of our own: In this, a great deal must be left to the Judgment of the Sorter; for, it would be adverted to, that either of 7 or 8 Pound Weight of washen Yarn, or any Thing betwixt them, the Hanks being all equal to one another, a very good Warp may be made for forty Yards of Cloth of any Hundred, from 1200 to 2000; It is only as you find your Web light or throng that you should adapt the Weft to it. But further, Slaying-tables are needless, because Manufacturers are supposed already to know them, and they are the only Persons who can follow them; for, where there is not Variety of Yarn to sort on, a Slaying-table signifies nothing.

But, that I may not leave private Persons without a Remedy, as if I were advancing, that Manufacturers should engross all the fine Cloth, or that nothing should be done for employing the many good Weavers we have in Scotland, especially about *Edinburgh*, who work for other People; I shall notice this one Thing further.

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Nations
 In *Scotland*, Makers of Cloth would have an Advantage over other Nations, who purchase their Yarn only by Weight; if the Tale of it could be ascertained, they could, on weighing it, know precisely what Reed to size it to; But, till our Compt can be depended on, we had best follow the Example of some of our Neighbours, (tho' with this Advantage over them, that we can sort our Hanks of equal Weight to one another) who, by the Guess of their Eye, take from seven to eight Pound Weight of Yarn, as they design to Kamm it thick or thin, and prepare it for making a Warp to forty Yards in 1800. When they have run Nine hundred of it up upon their Warping-Bars, they take it off and weigh it; If it is lighter than Half of their whole Weight, they then reckon, very justly, the Yarn is too fine, and therefore, run up the other Part of it to 1000 or 1100: If they find it heavier, they run it up perhaps only to Seven hundred or Eight hundred; and indeed, as the former gives them all they want, so this can run no further with them. Perhaps it would be a short Cut, especially to those Weavers, who think their Warp does not beam so well in Halves, to run out their Yarn, counting by the String, and then put it in such a Reed as it comes up to, without leaving any Quantity on the Bobins, or wynding more for Eiks, to make it up what they intended. I shall conclude this Paragraph, with a Query to those who have Skill; whether or
not,

not, if this Supposition, that Warps for so many different Kinds may be of the same Weight; What would be proper Weights of West for eight and seven Pound of Warp? As I have already ventured too far, I do not incline to be the first Gueffer in this; tho', I believe, it may be answered without Witchcraft.

Would it not greatly forward private People in making Quantities of fine Cloth, if the Trustees sought out, and encouraged People of Skill to follow out the Stapling of Yarn in a proper Manner, and enabled them to sell warped Webs with suitable Wests at easy Rates? The Manner in which this might be brought about, submitting it to their Honours, may be thus, That at some certain Place in *Edinburgh*, Warps of a certain Length, with Wests of the best Flax, at fix'd Prices, were always to be found ready for Sale; and that a competent Number of skilful Master-Weavers were agreed with to work them at so much for every Hundred, having right Reeds and Tackling: Or, if the Purchasers rather inclined to have them wrought by Weavers of their own Acquaintance; that then, fit Reeds being provided, with Kamms, Temples, and other such necessary Implements, they might purchase, along with their Webs, what of these their own Weaver wanted, who would not refuse to take them off the Buyer's Hand in Part of the Price of his Work.

Because of the Resort of Gentry from all Parts of the Country to *Edinburgh*, it seems to

be the fittest Place for selling fine Cloth ; Might it not be of Advantage to the Manufacturers, for the Reputation of our fine Cloth, and for preventing Strangers, and Persons not well-skill'd in Linnen, from being imposed upon, That a publick Office were erected here by the Trustees, where nothing but the best Cloth should be exposed, and that it should be narrowly inspected, even tho' formerly stamped, and on its being found very good, to get an additional Stamp and Rate put upon it.

I foresee his Method is liable to Inconveniences, such as the Difficulty the Inspectors will find to refuse receiving Cloth, when the Owner insists upon it, &c.

Therefore I shall substitute in its Place another Proposal, That the Trustees employ a skilful Person one Day every Week, to purchase with the publick Money Pieces of fine brown Cloth, made of good Flax, at reasonable Rates, to be by them sent to the Bleaching, and sold at such a Profit, as would pay the Person for his Trouble, and yield 5 per Cent for the advanced Money. And I am sorry to say, that I firmly believe a very small Sum in Comparison of what the Trustees may spare, would purchase all the fine brown Cloth in Scotland, that is worth buying. This Project would do very well in private Hands, if the Adventurers would be content with 5 per Cent.

As has been already noticed, the making of white Linnen, or keeping Weavers constantly employed

employed all the Year round, is the most tedious Manufacture on Earth; therefore some Help of this Kind seems necessary; For if the Manufacturers were sure of such an Out-let on their Cloth, they might on the same Stock keep at least twice as many Looms; and therefore would in this Case freely part with some of their Profit. An Encouragement of this Kind would put the fine Linnen much upon the same Footing with the low-priced Linnen of the Shires of *Perth* and *Angus*; where the Maker, the Moment his Cloth comes out of the Loom, carries it to the next trading Burrow, and sells it for ready Money, without Loss of Time. It is owing to this, that so many Hands are employed in these Countries, and that no more Stock is needed to carry on the weaving Trade, than as much Money as will purchase a sufficient Quantity of Yarn to fill his Loom once, and with this small Stock, he can carry on his Trade forever.

Here an Objection may be started, why encourage in this Manner publick Factories more than private Persons? I answer as before, a small Sum will purchase all. But Factories have this Advantage, while they subsist, they train up Workmen all the Year round in one particular Sort of Cloth, till they arrive at the greatest Perfection. Tho' indeed it must be owned in this, that the weaving Part is very easy; for it is he who sorts and sizes the Yarn, that is the chief Operator. It has been noticed

noticed above, that the Generality of other Linnen Weavers have but six Months Employment, thir have Twelve; and twelve Looms so employed, must throw off as much Linnen, as Twenty-four Looms employed by private Persons. 'Tis true the last named do not reckon on the Interest of their Money, which the others must do. But then 'tis likely the Manufacturers Cloth being so much better made, may yield an additional Price, that may reward him: For sometime the Factory-Cloth may not rise in its Price and Reputation, in Proportion to its Worth. But if the Reputation is once raised, it will out-live the Goodness (if ever it should be our Misfortune to work backward) perhaps as long a Time as the Goodness has preceeded the Reputation. I cannot break off here without noticing, that a great deal of bad Cloth has been bought and sold as Factory-cloth, that never had any Pretension to it, for there are Cheats in all Trades; and if the Honourable Trustees find not some proper Expedient to cheque this, our Linnen, after it has got some Reputation, will soon be as little valued in our Neighbour Nation, as our Threed is. I believe every Body knows, that this happen'd by Persons of no Skill, following out a Trade that had been by the making of good Threed justly brought into Repute; tho' now I am told, People who employ themselves in this Sort of Work, who make it right, must and do sell what they make themselves, and dare not.

not venture on the Fame of our Country. But to return, the Advantage subsisting Factories afford the Country, are, that the Workmen are made more Expert, and the Price and Reputation of our Linnen is raised.

Amongst the Advantages that arise to a Country, in the breaking up of a Manufactory, these following may be reckoned, Tradesmen and Apprentices, being bred to it, will endeavour to seek their Bread that Way ; and, as they have attained a greater Vogue, People will be fond to employ them : Of this I could produce Instances of some Men that have gone out of Factories, and set up for themselves. The breaking of the Companies in *England* ('tis said) produced more broad Cloth than these Companies could have made, had they subsisted: And, if the Manufactory at *Newmilns* had given up for any other Reason but the Union, by which *English* Cloth was brought in at low Prices, it probably would have had the same Effect; and, it cannot be denied, but that any little Thing of this Sort that is to be yet found amongst us, is solely owing to that Factory: And, I am apt to attribute the Number of good Linnen-Weavers we have about *Edinburgh*, more to the breaking up of the Linnen-Factory carried on there and in the Neighbourhood, than to any other Cause.

Tho' *Edinburgh* is the best Place for Sale of fine Cloth, yet perhaps it is the worst for carrying on that Work, while they have so many Weavers, and so little Yarn spun in their Neigh-

Neighbourhood. A Man working here must either purchase his Yarn by Commission at one Season of the Year, or be at the Charge of going for it. This would be prevented if the Place the Yarn is spun in could be the Place of Manufacture, and this cannot be so well done as by transporting skill'd Weavers to instruct the People of the several Countries what is their Interest to do.

It is to be presumed, that all the Factories which have subsisted for any Time, do make good Cloth; for without it they could not have ready Sale, or reasonable Profit: But as the best of them have risen from worse to better, it were to be wished, that for the Time to come, Intrants on this Trade were to undergo an Examination; for I believe it may be pretty evident from the sudden failing of some brisk Enterprizes of this Nature, that all the needful Skill, and reasonable Precautions have not preceeded some of these Undertakings. I do not think it is enough for a Man to say, I am venturing my own Stock, and may do as I list, I myself, if I am wrong, must be the first Sufferer; this is true; but he will, if he mis-carries, not be the only Sufferer, as much bad Cloth as he makes, so much Drawback comes on the Country's Reputation if it is vended as Factory-cloth. The Case was very different seven or eight Years ago; it was very reasonable then to admit all that inclined; but now, when something of Reputation is gained, it will

will be unreasonable to let every skilless Person be an Adventurer. I might enlarge here; but I promised you only Hints: And therefore all I say on this Head, is, That whoever undertakes this Trade without Skill, and carries it on without Application, is doing both himself and his Country a real Injury.

As none of the Honourable Trustees themselves are direct Professors of this Trade, tho' Fellow-helpers in the Labour, I hope I shall not be misconstrued if I adventure to say, that there are yet many *Arcana's* in it; how proper it is for some of them, when known, to be divulged, they must judge. But I humbly conceive they could not bestow *Premiums* better, than by giving something considerable annually to any Person or Society, who shall give the best Answer to certain Questions to be emitted by them: And besides the one I have already mentioned about the Weight of Wooff, I take the Liberty to suggest, that it may be no impertinent nor useless one to ask, What is the best Way to make Dressing for fine Cloth? (because coarse Cloth cannot afford it) it is agreed, that Bucktey Wheat is the properest Thing, by Reason it is more glutinous than our common Wheat, and is used by our Friends abroad, and that the longer it is kept, it is still the better: But my Question remains, What is the properest Ingredient to mix with it, to preserve it from Corruption? Because, tho' Salt would answer this End, yet it keeps the Cloth moist;

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and therefore should not be used. If the *Premium* is considerable, I'll try to give a Solution; Mean Time I think it would do no great Hurt (if the Trustees Powers could allow them) to take from another Vegetable fifteen Shillings in every Shire, and give it as a *Premium* for sowing an Acre with this same Buckety Wheat; for I can assure you if it should never arrive at Dressing, it needs not be lost, for it makes fine Pancakes. *Excerpt*

I cannot break off, without giving just Testimony to the Vigilance of the Honourable Trustees in the following Particular. The Checks made at *Kirkcaldy*, have, for several Years past, been justly reckoned the best Goods of that Kind for the Money, of any made in this Island. Within these few Weeks, two additional Dyers have set up in that Bounds; this, joined with the Rising of the Indigo, made the Dyers ask a greater Price for blue Yarn, of the former deep Colour, than they were in Use to get: Betwixt the Dyer and the Manufacturer, it has been agreed not to raise the Price, but to make the Yarn of a fainter Colour; and, to conceal this as much as possible from the Buyers of Check; some few of the Weavers have mixt this light-colour Thread about in the Warp, with other deeper blue Yarn. The Trustees have checked this in the Bud, by sending one of their Riding-Officers over amongst them, with full Power to take them to Task for this Abuse, and

to prevent it in Time coming; and we may expect to hear a good Account of it.

I wish the Honourable Trustees would fall on some proper Method to oblige the Workers of Diaper and Damask to ty up their Ends as they break: For, I am of Opinion, the Faults found with this Sort of Cloth are chiefly owing to this. I own, while the Weaver gives Way to Ease and Laziness, it cannot be well helped; It must be remembred, That Damask and Diaper are wrought on a long Stretch, plain Linnen on a short One; that is to say, in the former Work the Yarn-Beam must be carried far from the Cloth-Beam, that there may be Room for the Tackling, and for raising the Figures in Figured Work; where the Threed breaks, one End of it hangs perpendicular from the Yarn-Beam, the other End from the Cloth. The farther End is without the Man's Reach, except he rise and tie it, which he too often neglects to do, till he comes to dress it. The Yarn-beam of the plain Cloth is within the Man's Reach, and the Weaver ties it up when he stretches over: Besides, as there is commonly five Threeds in a Split, the Weaver of Naprie thinks one of five will not be so easily missed as the plain Weaver does one of two Threeds, and the Change of the Figure likewise helps to conceal this Fault.

As I reckon it the Duty of every Sex and Station to promote the Manufactures, I shall take the Liberty to mention the Practice of

some of the young Ladies in *Somersetshire*, which I wish were followed by those of that Station amongst us, who spend their Time in less profitable Employments: I am told in that Shire few Gentlemen, who can give their Daughters *L. 500* of Portion, give them any Cloaths after they are twelve Years old but what they spin for: I congratulate my Country, that something like this is already begun amongst us, and hope the Trustees will continue their *Premiums* for Yarn, which has already had so good Effect, that most of them are won by Ladies, whose Bread does not depend upon their Labour.

I have exceeded the Bounds of a Letter, tho' I thought to have noticed some other Things, I shall now break off. But if you incline I should be a further Correspondent, I shall frankly go into it, on do any Thing in my Power for the Interest of my Country. I am,

S^r R,

Yours, &c.

Edin. 9th Feb.

1734

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